

*Groupwork* 21(1), 2011, pp.59-82. © W&B, 2011. DOI: 10.1921/095182411X578847

---

# Groupwork: Myth or reality in school based decision-making

Newman Wadesango<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** This study sought to investigate the type and effects of leadership styles used by school heads in selected schools. The study adopted a qualitative/interpretive research methodology and used the case study research design as the operational framework for data gathering. Data was collected through interviews, documentary analysis and observation of two staff meetings per school from five secondary schools in Zimbabwe. The population sample comprised five secondary school heads and 20 secondary school teachers. The study established that imposed decisions face various problems during implementation. Teachers may reject the ideas for the simple reason that they were never part of its development. The study therefore recommends groupwork in decision-making if schools are to be effective.

**Keywords:** groupwork; decision-making; school based; teacher participation

1. Teaching Development Specialist

**Address for correspondence:** Dr Newman Wadesango, Walter Sisulu University, East London, Republic of South Africa.

[nwadesango@wsu.ac.za](mailto:nwadesango@wsu.ac.za) or [newmanwadesango@yahoo.com](mailto:newmanwadesango@yahoo.com).

## **Introduction**

Group participation in decision-making is a trend that is set to transform top-down approaches which reduced teachers to tools for implementing policies and decisions without giving them opportunities of making any meaningful contribution (Bezzina, 1997; Khoza, 2003). The idea of group participation is applied in various parts of the world and Zimbabwe is no exception. Teachers work closely with students and have first-hand knowledge of their strengths and weaknesses, therefore, they are the most valuable people to develop and implement policies (Kumar & Scuderi, 2000). Teacher participation refers to the extent to which subordinates or groups who are affected by decisions are consulted and involved in making of decisions (Khoza, 2003). In other words, groupwork refers to the decentralisation of authority to the lowest appropriate level in the school where teachers participate in making decisions that affect them. Group participation is not only about taking part in the decision-making process but it is also about being valued (Lilyquist, 1998). Groups feel rewarded when they are part of the decision-making process.

Group participation calls for teachers to assume leadership roles in schools and it requires that principals encourage such leadership from teachers (Bezzina, 1997; Wagner, 1999). Principals cannot manage schools alone nor take the burden of motivating others to achieve objectives and complete tasks without support from their colleagues, they must actively involve them (Bell, 1999; Khoza, 2003). Group-participation is linked to decision-making in that it leads to teacher empowerment. Teacher empowerment is the transfer of decision-making authority of key issues to people who in the past had looked to an authority to make decisions (Mokoena, 2003; Prozesky & Mouton, 2005).

## **Conceptual framework**

Decision-making can be a painful process since it usually involves change, conflict, the risk of being wrong and being called to account, having to cope with a bewildering number of facts and alternatives (Everand & Morris, 1996; Bezzina, 1997). In fact, failure to take

decisions, as 'management default', often has the same effect as a decision and is often worse than any considered alternative (Hoy & Tarter, 2003; Beckmann & Visser, 1999). The risk of not deciding is often the greatest of all risks to the organisation.

According to Juru (2002) decision-making is an accepted part of everyday human life. A decision is a choice whereby a person forms a conclusion about a situation. The purpose of decision-making is to direct human behaviour towards a future goal. Abu-Duhoe (1999) regards decision-making as the selection of a course of action from among alternatives; it is the core of planning. A plan cannot be said to exist unless a decision, a commitment of resources, direction or reputation has been made. Managers sometimes see decision-making as their central job because they must constantly choose what is to be done, who is to do it and how is it to be done (Wadesango & Shumba, 2009). Managers should adopt groupwork leadership techniques in the process of selecting a course of action from among the listed alternatives so as to come up with the best solution to a problem. There is need for groupwork in this process because one person cannot know everything.

Juru (2002) regards decision-making as a process of identifying a problem, testing the alternatives and selecting the best alternative for implementation. This process cannot be done by one person but by all stakeholders who will be affected by the decision that will be taken, hence the need for groupwork (Mokoena, 2003). Accordingly then, decision-making involves consideration of relevant facts and consequences against a background of values and value conflicts (Khoza, 2003). One starts off with opinions rather than facts. The decisions are then tested against experience. To make a decision requires the consideration of alternatives (Morse, Berger & Osnes, 1997). Therefore, an effective head will create and foster differing views through the process of shared decision-making (Matunhu, 2002). Wadesango and Shumba (2009) assert that decision-making is a sequential process that ends up in a single decision or series of choices that stimulate moves or actions. There is therefore need for groupwork if this is to be successful.

Bakkeness, DeBrander and Imants (1999) have observed that decision-making lies close to the nerve centre of school administration. It is at the center of the head's job. All other activities are implemented because of the decisions that the head makes. Wadesango & Shumba (2003) share the view of Bakkeness et al. (1999) by postulating that

decision-making is synonymous with administration. It is therefore the administrator's duty to be very clear about this function. It is not only the administrator who should worry about decision-making, but as Prozesky and Mouton (2005, p.201) say, 'in collegial organisations, there is a strong norm that groups have the right to participate in decisions influencing their activities', hence the importance of groupwork should not be underestimated.

According to Matunhu (2002), all teachers should take part in decision-making because the school like other formal organisations, is basically a decision-making forum. The head and teachers devote much of their time to the decision-making process (Wadesango & Shumba, 2009). Accordingly, Morse et al (1997) 'decision-making is not a separate, isolated function of management, but rather is a common core to the others'. As such, groupwork has become a central issue in the running of organisations. Bridges (1997, p.131) contends that 'groupwork is at the center of administrative and educational activity and is a key concept in bringing about administrative effectiveness for school executives'.

As posited by Khoza (2003, p.34) 'decisions should be made at the level closest to the people who will be affected by them'. Since teachers are affected by most decisions made in the school and are key actors in implementing the decisions, they should be given a chance to participate in the decisions influencing their activities (Mokoena, 2003; Wadesango & Shumba, 2009). This goes to emphasise the importance of groupwork in decision-making.

The Zimbabwean School Act of 1995 (Section 29A subsection (I), is a statutory measure which ensures that there is groupwork in the governance of public schools. According to this Act, the governance of every public school is vested in its school development committee (SDC) and the principal of the school has formal legal authority in terms of the management of the school. The SDC is regarded as a group since it is established to assist school heads in decision-making. This implies that both the governing body and the principal are legally required to perform certain functions for which they are accountable. Therefore, in order for schools to be effective, there should be groupwork in the formulation of policies that impact school operations. The concept of groupwork is centred on the mindset that decisions that impact the group are shared by the organisation membership. In a school setting

those members would be the principal, teachers, students and the parents (Hoy & Miskel, 2005).

## **Leadership styles**

### **Autocratic or authoritarian style**

The autocratic leadership style is seen as an old fashioned technique. Under the autocratic leadership style, all decision-making powers are centralized in the leader, as with dictator leaders (Bridges, 1997; Newman et al., 1997). They do not entertain any suggestions or initiatives from group members. This leadership style contradicts with the principles of groupwork as managers seek to make as many decisions as possible. Groupwork is minimal and decision-making becomes a solitary process.

### **Participative or democratic style**

Democratic leadership promotes sharing of responsibility, exercise of delegation and continual consultation (Jaques, 2000; Bridges, 1997). There is a component of groupwork in this leadership style as managers seek consultation on all major issues and decisions. The manager effectively delegates tasks to the whole group and gives them full control and responsibility for those tasks. Like the scenario in groupwork leadership style, democratic leaders encourage group members to lead and be involved in leadership development. The decisions of the democratic leader are not unilateral as with the autocrat because they arise from consultation with the group members and participation by them. Earl (1986) asserts that democratic leaders offer guidance to group members, and they also participate in the group and allow input from other group members.

### **Laissez-faire or free-rein style**

A free-rein leader does not lead, but leaves the group entirely to itself. This type of leader allows maximum freedom to subordinates, by giving them a free hand in deciding their own policies and methods (Lejk

& Wyvill, 1996; Juru, 2002). This style is also linked to groupwork leadership styles in the sense that there is group involvement in decision-making. Decisions are not made by one person.

## **Group leadership**

In contrast to individual leadership, some organisations have adopted group leadership. In this situation, more than one person provides direction to the group as a whole (Falchikov, 1986; Orsmond et al. 1996). Some organisations have taken this approach in hopes of increasing creativity, reducing costs, or downsizing. Others may see the traditional leadership of a boss as costing too much in team performance (Conway et al., 1993).

## **Group decision-making methods**

Some of the more common group decision-making methods are brainstorming, dialectical inquiry, nominal group technique, and the Delphi.

### **Brainstorming**

Brainstorming involves group members verbally suggesting ideas or alternative courses of action. The situation at hand is described in as much detail as necessary so that group members have a complete understanding of the issue or problem (Conway et al., 1993; Newman et al., 1997). The group leader or facilitator then solicits ideas from all members of the group. Usually, the group leader or facilitator will record the ideas presented on a flip chart or marker board (Brundrette, 1998; Gathrie & Koppich, 2001). Once the ideas of the group members have been exhausted, the group members then begin the process of evaluating the utility of the different suggestions presented.

### **Dialectical inquiry**

Essentially, dialectical inquiry focuses on ensuring full consideration

of alternatives. It involves dividing the group into opposing sides to debate the advantages and disadvantages of proposed solutions or decisions (Rezabek, 1999; Kumar & Sederi, 2000). A similar group decision-making method, devil's advocacy, requires that one member of the group highlights the potential problems with a proposed decision (Goldfinch, 1994; Lejk & Wyvill, 1996). It is believed that both of these techniques are designed to try and make sure that the group considers all possible ramifications of its decision.

### **Nominal group technique**

Group members are required to compose a comprehensive list of their ideas or proposed alternatives in writing (Orsmond et al., 1996; Li, 2001). The group members usually record their ideas privately. Once finished, each group member is asked, in turn, to provide one item from their list until all ideas or alternatives have been publicly recorded on a flip chart or marker board (Goldfinch, 1994; Bottery, 2001). At this stage of the process verbal exchanges are limited to requests for clarification and no evaluation or criticism of listed ideas is permitted (Bridges, 1997; Cheng & Warren, 2000). According to the proponents of this technique, once all proposals are listed publicly, the group engages in a discussion of the listed alternatives, which ends in some form of ranking or rating in order of preference.

### **Delphi technique**

The Delphi technique can be used by decision-making groups when the individual members are in different physical locations. The technique was developed at the Rand Corporation (Li, 2001; Matunhu, 2002). The individuals in the Delphi group are usually selected because of the specific knowledge or expertise of the problem they possess. Each group member is asked to independently provide ideas, input, and/or alternative solutions to the decision problem in successive stages (Jaques, 2000; Juru, 2002). These inputs may be provided in a variety of ways, such as e-mail, fax, or online in a discussion room or electronic bulletin board. After each stage in the process, other group members ask questions and alternatives are ranked or rated in some fashion (Earl, 1986; Beckmann & Blom, 2000). After an indefinite number

of rounds, the group eventually arrives at a consensus decision on the best course of action.

## **Statement of the problem**

Although the Ministry of Education in Zimbabwe has devolved power and authority to schools, the extent of groupwork in decision-making is not properly known as teachers seem to have different views of their involvement in the process. The lack of groupwork in decision-making seems to be of great concern to them, because they feel that it discourages initiative and genuine commitment to their work. They also feel that their useful ideas are likely to be stifled or ignored if they are not fully involved in decision-making.

## **Research methodology**

The study is premised within the interpretive paradigm and aims to give descriptive analysis of the effects of autocratic leadership styles on the effectiveness and efficiency of schools as organisations. Interviews, observation and documentary analysis have been proposed as suitable methods in a qualitative descriptive investigation (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). Face-to-face interviews were held with all the participants. The researcher observed two staff meetings per school under study. School documents were also analysed. Purposive, convenient and stratified sampling was used to select the participating schools as well as the participants in the study. Participants included 25 secondary school teachers and five secondary school heads each from a different school in Gweru District.

## **Results**

### **The outcome of decisions made without group consensus**

The majority of the respondents asserted that in most of the cases certain decisions reached without their consultation were not successful



because they were difficult to implement. Some of the reasons given are presented as follows:

*R12 One man decision have tended to be retrogressive and sort of self centered and have not really done any good to the school because why I am saying so is at times, the head can make a decision which does not improve the well being of the school at large. They are not successful. I would say most of them are a failure for example; there is a time when the head of school at assembly said, I have decided that we have civvies on Monday. The pupils rejected and he said you are all coming in your clothes and bring the money for civvies. When we left assembly we said to the head this is not proper because it will be on a Monday but he refused to listen to our advice and come the purported day for the civvies, most of the pupils did not come to school and the whole programme was not fruitful as very few cents were realised.*

This statement clearly shows how important groupwork is in the decision-making process. In the above scenario, if there was group consensus before the decision was announced to students, teachers could have mobilised students to make contributions and the project could have been successful.

*R1 On a scale of 1:10 imposed decisions have scored 2. They haven't been successful at all because people would not cooperate since they are not consulted for fine tuning the decisions. They are not always successful. I have seen in one or two occasions when we had to correct things that had been said, be it on assembly or in meetings. And we said that's not the way you should have done it. You should have done it this way. The participation of members would not be as active as if the head had consulted everyone. This has negative results as staff members would make effort to show that they are not part of it.*

The study continued to probe teachers on the success of decisions in which they have not been consulted as a group and it emerged that according to all the participants, such decisions were not very successful in their implementation. Some of the reasons given were:

*(a) Usually they were bound to fail because the person who is supposed to implement those decisions will not be in a position to understand why that particular decision was taken. Teachers may not be really pleased with the decision*

that has been taken, so the lack of commitment to implementation would lead to failure. In one school, teachers had an ordeal to share with the researcher. They said that their head had unilaterally ordered text books that were not the most appropriate for an 'Ordinary' level Science syllabus as well as having deployed an inexperienced teacher to teach an examinable 'Ordinary' level class. Come, national examinations most of the students failed. There was a 10% pass rate. This was catastrophic in a department that used to record an average of 40% pass rate. The school head was summoned to the District Education Office to explain the circumstances surrounding this dismal failure.

(b) Teachers always find ways to circumvent orders; at the least they offer passive resistance. In one school, teachers gave an example of an event in which the school administration forced teachers to adopt a new format of scheming and planning, without any prior discussion on the merits for affecting the status quo. The new format entailed teachers to scheme their work up to the end of the term instead of the norm where they were required to scheme two weeks ahead. It was stated that the teachers soon learned that the innovation was not a directive from the Ministry but that their head just wanted to experiment with them. Teachers simply did not comply with the directive. The school head was now in a difficult situation as he could not discipline any of the teachers because his ideas did not have the support of the District Education Officer. No teacher came out openly to say that they were not going to implement the innovation and yet no teacher implemented the innovation. This was a case of passive resistance.

(c) The implementer finds it very difficult to own or to be part of that particular decision because s/he was not involved in the discussions leading to the decision. At times, one feels uncomfortable to implement something they are not well versed in considering that some decisions may lack clarity. As a result, implementers do it half-heartedly. Participants asserted that imposed decisions are difficult to implement because their objective will not be clear hence mistakes are likely to be high in the implementation process. Sometimes these decisions will be directed to pupils and it becomes hard for the teacher to supervise these pupils, especially if one was not involved in the formulation of the decision.

As was the case in one school where a teacher gave an example of a situation when the head announced that pupils were not allowed to visit the toilet during lesson time and that teachers should make sure that pupils abide by the policy. Teachers felt that although it was a noble

idea not to interrupt lessons, there was need for all stake-holders to sit down and look at the modalities of effecting the policy since some of the pupils will be having health related problems. It was indicated that teachers never implemented the innovation. All responding teachers indicated that decisions made without group consensus were likely to face problems during the implementation stage and such decisions would not be successful, as indicated in the above scenarios.

When school heads were asked to rate the success of decisions taken without group consensus, they concurred with their teachers that the probability of success of such imposed decisions was negligible. Some of them made the following comments:

*H1: Definitely they are not Sir. Decisions made without consultation are like a bitter pill to swallow. There is passive resistance; at times one should avoid such decisions. You have to be very diplomatic.*

*H2: They are not but the truth is that it depends on the nature of the problem, as a leader you are forced by circumstances at times to make unilateral decisions.*

The interpretation of H2's statement is that although difficult to take, decisions made without consulting the whole group at times tend to yield the desired results over time. Talking about the success rate of such decisions, H5 had this to elaborate,

*It's half, half Sir! At times or in fact most of the time decisions made by one person are not successful in their implementation because the implementers may just sit and relax. But yes, at times they can be successful and when they are successful, teachers openly pay tribute to the head's vision.*

This particular school head was referring to an incident when 'Advanced' level teachers were asked to offer extra lessons on Friday afternoons which are supposed to be a half day. Initially, teachers tried to resist but the school head did not budge. However, at the end of the year the school recorded a significant rise in pass rate. Some of the teachers were rewarded by the Regional Office and they later on paid tribute to their head for a noble idea of introducing Friday afternoon lessons. The same sentiments were echoed by H3 who made the following comment:

*Some ideas are not implemented because teachers may not appreciate the objectives let alone the benefits that will accrue from them, but however, there are times when decisions taken without consultation yield positive results.*

The study established that most of the teachers from the four schools where there was no groupwork in the decision-making process were coming to work late and dismissing earlier than the official knock off time. The responding teachers further indicated to the researcher that truancy, unmarked pupils' books, faked illnesses and general laziness was now the order of the day in these four schools. These are the signs of poor commitment to duty. The above sentiments were also confirmed by the head's outburst in one of the meetings attended. The head told members that absenteeism was on the increase. It was established that some of the teachers were no longer committed to their work especially in four of the five participating schools. This was confirmed by R1's sentiments:

*So I would rather say, commitment is low. People just come to work for the sake of being seen. They don't work.*

Some of the teachers from these four schools generally expressed dissatisfaction in the way in which they are marginalized at their schools. They think that involvement of the whole group in decision-making on critical issues would assist their heads move from the current low morale. To them, low staff morale is vented in absenteeism and coming late to work. It was established that most of the time teachers were coming late for lessons.

The minutes that were reviewed indicated that there was no groupwork in most of the decisions that were taken. A perusal of staff meeting minutes indicated that in most cases, heads were just telling teachers what to do. For example, in one school, the minutes read, 'midyear examinations have been cancelled due to circumstances beyond our control.' These sentiments were echoed by the school head. When teachers asked for an explanation, it was discovered that the deputy head had not yet covered his science form four syllabus and his paper was among the first to be written. This was despite the fact that initially the midyear dates had been agreed upon by the whole staff and there was need to consult again before making a verdict.

In the same minute book, the head advised his teachers that they were all expected to report for duty the following Saturday for a School Development Committee (SDC) meeting. However, SDC meetings are supposed to be held on Fridays according to the Ministry of Education regulations so as to accommodate teachers who are Seventh Day Adventists. When asked for the reason, the school head indicated that the SDC chairperson was in South Africa on a personal visit and was only coming back that very Friday.

In another school, the minutes indicated that the head told teachers to desist from receiving visits or phone calls during working hours regardless of whether they were free at that particular time. The same minute book went on to read, *the head was going to tell all pupils to report to him any teacher who made or received a call during working hours*. The implication of the statements above is that certain issues were not debated by teachers but dictated to them by heads.

The meetings that were attended by the researcher also confirmed that teachers in four schools (B, C, D and E) were not consulted in staff meetings by the heads in matters of concern. In critical decisions, it emerged that only one head of school (school A) consulted teachers first. The others were just issuing teachers with instructions. It also emerged in these meetings that major agenda items were dominated and imposed upon teachers by the school heads. The school management teams would emphasize their authority by the way they expressed themselves. Staff meetings attended confirmed that school heads, their deputies, senior women and senior masters participated more in critical school decisions than other members of staff.

The table below shows the leadership styles prevailing in the schools under study:

Table: 1

---

Name of school	Perceived leadership style
A	Democracy
B	Autocracy
C	Autocracy
D	Autocracy
E	Autocracy

---

It is evident from table 1 above that four of the five schools under

study do not recognise the importance of groupwork in decision-making. Heads of these schools are encouraged to adopt group decision-making techniques such as brainstorming, dialectical inquiry, nominal group technique, and the Delphi in the decision-making process.

## **Discussion**

### **Imposed decisions lack clarity**

The notion that school heads, like any other person, may not know everything emphasises the need for consultations and groupwork in decision-making. Best decisions tend to come with best knowledge and best practice in areas of decision-making (Wadesango & Shumba, 2009). Therefore, the need to involve the whole group in decision-making may be unquestionable. Criticism of the marginalisation of groups in decision-making is that imposed decisions lack clarity at implementation (Khoza, 2003; Wadesango & Shumba, 2009). In support, Carnoy (2002) argues that subordinates find it hard to execute decisions made without their knowledge. This may be because teachers do not have a clear picture of what is to be done. They may lack that desired critical mass in the form of competence, skills, knowledge, aptitude and attitude that is required to have a perfect decision.

### **Effects of imposed decisions**

Effective implementation of any decision depends largely on the acceptance and support by groups (Mungunda, 2003). It is important to consider the group's concerns because if people are angry regarding the way decisions are taken, such decisions will not proceed smoothly. Their feelings and perceptions account for the success or failure of the decision. This study observes that groupwork in decision-making is a positive move and decisions taken after wide consultations are usually successful. Chung (1998) also identifies groupwork as a key success factor. Notwithstanding Chung's above sentiment, as the Zimbabwe Minister of Education and Culture during her time she failed to provide a blueprint of how and to what level teachers should be involved in the groupwork decision-making processes in Zimbabwe. In the Republic

of South Africa, non involvement of teachers in formulation of the revised curriculum (C2005) led to major challenges in implementation (Mungunda, 2003).

The study revealed that effective implementation of any decisions depends largely on the acceptance and support by the group affected by them. Teachers claim that imposed decisions are not always successful in their implementation. It is important to consider other people's concerns. Their feelings and perceptions account for the success or failure of the decision. Researchers tend to concur on the notion that some of the decisions made without group consensus are not always successful (Rezabek, 1999). People who participate in and help formulate decisions will support and work hard to make them succeed because they contributed to the decision-making. The point to make is that decisions are likely to be unsuccessful and expensive to execute because of lack of support and involvement of the whole group. One may argue that decisions may fail irrespective of whether there is groupwork or not. The fact that decision-making takes place without the full knowledge of the effect of other variables may still see some decisions failing while others succeed.

### **Other competing variables**

While teachers can be excluded from the decision-making process as stated above, the head may not be able to manipulate or control other equally important variables like the macro-economic, social, judiciary and political environment. School heads may fully involve their teachers on the decision to purchase a school truck from overseas. Perfect plans may be reached with all the stakeholders but such decisions may not yield positive results if the inflation rises by 200% overnight as the trend is in Zimbabwe, or if central government promulgates a piece of legislation that forbids the importation of such vehicles. Thus, while it is accepted that imposed decisions do not always succeed, there is need to note that the statement may not hold true in all the cases.

An inquiry into why teachers tend to believe that decisions made by the school management teams only without group consensus have a high failure rate showed that teachers base their argument on teacher-centred perceptions. However an interrogation of these views reveals protectionist sentiments according to one of the responding

teachers' sentiments. They are considered so because teachers tend to want to ensure the success of decisions. Teachers want to protect their interests. They feel that their exclusion from the decision-making process is a fertile ground for non-implementers of decisions to come up with decisions that infer the interests of the teachers. This view is supported by change management specialists who believe that people are generally conservative (Sadovnik, 2007). They dislike change and thus would prefer the status quo. They fear change because change calls for new routines, new ways of doing business, it calls for de-learning and re-learning. To an average teacher, such demands may bring about an intellectual and emotional distress, frustrations and instability.

#### **Exclusion from issues within zone of expertise**

Teachers may not take delight in cases where decisions on issues of curriculum and school-based promotions are made on behalf of the group. They want to engage their decision-making faculties at their organisational levels. They want to demonstrate to their superiors that they command both pedagogical and administrative skills which can be harnessed for the benefit of the organisation. This is true if one considers that there are several leaders within the school who may not be managers. Such informal leaders may have a greater audience than the school head. Failure to acknowledge and commit such potential leaders in decision-making may see them working against the school head and the entire system may collapse. In agreement, Smylie, Lazarus and Conveyers (1999) study found out that teachers appear substantially more willing to participate in all areas of decision-making if they perceive their relationships with their principals as more open, collaborative, facilitative and supportive. They are much less willing to participate in any area of decision-making if they characterise their relationships with their principals as closed, exclusionary and controlling. Working in closed relationships results in teachers fighting against the decision and making sure that nothing succeeds in that school (Khoza, 2003).

Cases have presented themselves where a lot of effort is spent trying to counteract the different views at school. Such conflict is dysfunctional and is unaccepted. School heads may circumvent such scenarios by adopting groupwork leadership styles mentioned earlier on. More so, some of the teachers may be formal leaders in organisations that operate outside the



school. Such teachers may be political, religious or traditional leaders. All these leadership competencies exercised outside the school need to be put together through groupwork for the benefit of the school. Considering the diversity of the socio-economic, political and legal experiences that teachers may have as a group, and as individuals, one finds it difficult to accept the marginalisation of teachers in decision-making. It is self defeating and compromises the school output.

### **Staff morale**

The study found that staff morale was very high in one of the participating schools. This could be a result of groupwork in the decision-making process. Accordingly, Mokoena's (2003) study concludes that where teachers are given an opportunity to participate in decision-making, indications are that they experience high morale. Hence, there is a direct relationship between teacher participation and increased staff morale (Likert, 1996). The study further established that most of the responding teachers from four of the participating schools where heads were autocratic were less committed to their obligational duties. Generally, most of these teachers did not feel part and parcel of their organisations.

### **Students' Performance**

This reality of life calls for groupwork in decision-making in schools for the benefit of the whole school. It was found in this study that there may be a positive correlation between participation in decision-making and output. The study found that 'Ordinary' level results might be positively correlated with the level of teacher participation in the groupwork decision-making process. The higher the level of disgruntlement, the poorer the results, while the reverse held true in the school with greater participation. The study identified school A where there was meaningful groupwork in decision-making of critical issues. An analysis of the school's performance in national examinations showed an impressive picture. The school's 'Ordinary' level results have been increasing over a five year period. The school climate was conducive to good pass rates, which ranged from 89% to 98%. Teacher retention was extremely high and the school climate was very goal oriented.

### **Absenteeism**

It was also observed that higher teacher absenteeism tended to be positively correlated with teacher involvement and participation in decision-making processes. A decline in absenteeism was found in a school where there was groupwork in decision-making in strategic issues. These views are supported by Carnoy (2002) who says that the link between participation in shared decision-making and teacher attendance is supported in both the effective schools and restructuring research. Carnoy further argues that higher teacher absenteeism occurred in schools where teachers were excluded from participation in decision-making. Also a decline in absenteeism was recorded after teachers became actively involved in decision-making.

### **Collegial interaction**

It was established that the exclusion of teachers in certain strategic areas in decision making has led to the formation of small groups in four schools where there was no groupwork. It was indicated that small sub-groups had been formed in these schools, some of which were seeking favour from the administration by back-biting others. Some of the responding teachers from these four schools asserted that there was very little collegial interaction and some of the interaction was viewed with suspicion by the next person because of the camps in the school. Teachers were now interacting in small groups to share their personal grievances. Gossiping was very high as teachers did not have the correct platform to share ideas. Teachers were united within their small cliques. The net outcome was that a class of people with similar problems or interests form a clique, not really for the good of the institution but to satisfy other social demands that could be at cross purposes with the interests of the school. This signifies the effects of poor groupwork in decision-making or the effects of differences of opinion amongst the teachers when heads make decisions that please some and not others.

While this correlation could be spurious, the study concluded that in four of the schools under study, there is low commitment, low collegiality, high teacher absenteeism, low team work, low job satisfaction and low motivation as well as low student attainment in national examinations. Apparently, there is no groupwork in decision-making in these schools. This notion is confirmed by Wall and Rinechart (1999) whose research

found out that participation enhances job satisfaction.

The education paradigm calls on educational leaders to use their authority and power to develop the ability of others. In Zimbabwe at present, the most constructive and effective use of power is when it is used to empower others. Policy and legislation in Zimbabwe specifies that the major stakeholders should share power in school management and governance (Statutory Instrument 87 of 1992).

For schools to be effective and efficient, school heads should familiarize themselves with groupwork leadership models. According to Bush (2003), collegial models include all those theories which emphasize that power and decision-making should be shared among some or all members of the organisation. These models assume that decisions are reached by consensus rather than division or conflict. Collegial models assume that organisations determine policy and make decisions through a process of discussion leading to consensus. Power is shared among some or all members of the organisation who are thought to have a shared understanding about the aims of the institution (Bush, 2003). This is contrary to formal (autocratic) models which are being practised by four school heads in this study. Bush (2003) asserts that formal models assume that organisations are hierarchical systems in which managers use rational means to pursue agreed goals. A central assumption of formal models (Bush, 2003) is that power resides at the apex of the pyramid. Goals are determined largely by the principal and endorsed without question by other staff.

## **Conclusion**

Groupwork encourages teachers to improve the quality of their profession and workplace, which may result in a less stressful, more satisfying and motivating environment. It emerged that some of the decisions that have been made by the heads unilaterally without group consensus have suffered a low success rate. At the same time, others have been very successful and teachers were pleased with the outcome. It was further established that in certain circumstances decisions made without group involvement have been difficult to implement. Most probably because such decisions lack clarity and that teachers tend to receive the decisions with suspicion. It is the study's submission that

such decisions are likely to be implemented half-heartedly. Their success is questionable right from the onset. However, in cases where the whole group feels part to a decision, they are likely to implement the decision with vigour and enthusiasm, thus increasing the probability of success.

This study should be of significance to the groupwork audience as its results will make them aware of the effect of lack of groupwork on organisational effectiveness. The findings of the study will also enlighten groupwork administrators on the degree of participation desired by groups in decision-making. This study should be of significance as its results would highlight the importance of group decision-making in taking advantage of the diverse strengths and expertise of its members. It must be brought to the fore that by tapping the unique qualities of group members, it is possible that the group can generate a greater number of alternatives that are of higher quality than the individual. It is vital for the readers of this article to understand that if a greater number of higher quality alternatives are generated, then it is likely that the group will eventually reach a superior problem solution than the individual.

Decision-making may lead to a greater collective understanding of the eventual course of action chosen, since it is possible that many affected by the decision implementation actually had input into the decision. This may promote a sense of ownership of the decision, which is likely to contribute to a greater acceptance of the course of action selected and greater commitment on the part of the affected individuals to make the course of action successful.

However, readers should also be aware of one difficulty with groupwork. It does not work as quickly compared to when a person is working alone. Patience, communication skills and commitment are all required to make the most of contributions from all group members. Thus, effective groupwork requires each member to focus on the process rather than just the product. It is the intention of the study to inform readers that insignificant groupwork in school decisions can lead to the formation of small groups in schools. Once teachers start to interact in these small groups, this tends to affect team work as teachers will be teaming up to the detriment of the school.

Different situations call for different leadership styles. In an emergency when there is little time to converge on an agreement and where a designated authority has significantly more experience or expertise than the rest of the team, an autocratic leadership style may

be most effective. However, in a highly motivated and aligned team with a homogeneous level of expertise, a more democratic or groupwork leadership technique may be more effective. It is therefore crucial to adopt the leadership style that most effectively achieves the objectives of the group while balancing the interests of its individual members.

## **Recommendations**

The study recommends groupwork in decision-making. This implies that teachers need the opportunity and space to participate in decision-making at a level that is beyond the classroom. Such involvement provides fora through which teachers' creativity contribute to the running of their schools. Allowing teachers access to meaningful decision-making may provide a fertile ground for them to look at themselves with respect and dignity. Teachers are likely to regard this climate with esteem and trust. Furthermore they may feel respected if their interests and expertise are recognised in the decision-making processes. Perhaps more importantly, this recognition is likely to unlock vast levels of cooperation, dedication and commitment which are essential ingredients for the success of the school. It is high-time school heads considered accepting and implementing feasible ideas from their subordinates. Thus teachers should not be there to rubber stamp decisions. It is further recommended that free dialogue be encouraged in staff meetings. More so, teachers should be allowed to suggest as well as participate in the fine tuning of decisions.

## **References**

- Abu-Duhoe, I. (1999) *School Based Management*. Paris: UNESCO
- Bakkeness, I., DeBrander, C., and Imants, J. (1999) Teacher isolation and communication network analysis in primary schools. *Educational Administration Quarterly*. 35, 2, 166-202
- Babbie, E and Mouton, J. (2001) *The Price Of Social Research*. Capetown: Oxford
- Beckmann, J.L. and Blom, M.A. (2000) Thoughts on accountability and democratic school management. *South Africa Journal of Education*, 17, 4, 196-202

- Beckmann, J.L. and Visser, P.J. (1999) *Some Legal Aspects of Capacity Building for Public School Governors*. Paper read at the 2nd International Conference of the Educational Management Association of South Africa, Port Elizabeth
- Bell, L. (1999) *Qualitative Research Methods*. London: Routledge
- Bezzina, C. (1997) Restructuring schools in Malta. *International Journal of Educational Management*, 11, 5, 194-202
- Bottery, M. (2001) Globalization and the UK competition state: No room for transformational leadership in education. *School Leadership and Management*, 21, 2, 199-218
- Bridges, E.A. (1997) A model for shared decision making in the school principalship. *Education Administration Quarterly*, 3, 2, 49-61
- Brundrette, M. (1998) What lies behind collegiality, legitimation or control? *Educational Management and Administration*, 26, 3, 305-316
- Bush, T. (2003) *Theories of Educational Leadership and Management: (3rd ed.)* London: Sage
- Carnoy, M. (1999, May) *Globalization and Educational Reforms: What planners need to know*. Paper presented at the International Institute for Educational Planning, Paris
- Carnoy, M. (2002) *Foreword: Educational restructuring in the concept of globalization and local demands*. New York: Routledge and Falmer
- Cheng, W. and Warren, M. (2000) Making a difference: using peers to assess individual students' contributions to a group project. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 5, 2, 243-256
- Conway, R., Kember, D., Sivan, A., and Wu, M. (1993) Peer Assessment of an individual's contribution to a group project. *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education*, 18, (1, 45-54
- Chung, F. (1998) *Socialism, Education and Development: A challenge to Zimbabwe*. Harare: Zimbabwe Pub House
- Earl, S.E. (1986) Staff and peer assessment: Measuring an individual's contribution to group performance. *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education*, 11, 1, 60-69
- Eggleston, J. (1999) *Teacher Decision-making in the Classroom*. London: Routledge
- Everand, B. and Morris, G. (1996) *Effective School Management*. London: Chapman
- Falchikov, N. (1986) Product Comparisons and process benefits of collaborative peer group and self-assessments. *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education*, 11, 2, 146-166
- Goldfinch, J. (1994) Further development in peer assessment of group projects.

- Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education*, 19, 1, 29-35
- Guthrie, J.W. and Koppich, J.E. (2001) *Building a Model of Education Reform and High Politics*. London: Falmer
- Hoy, W.K. and Miskel, L.G. (2005) *Educational Administration Theory: Research and practice*. New York: McGraw-Hill
- Hoy, W.K. and Tarter, C.J (2003) A normative model of shared decision-making. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 35, 2, 140-149
- Jacobson, S.L. and Berne, R. (1999) *Reforming Education*. New York: Corwin
- Jaques, D. (2000) *Learning in Groups* (3rd ed.) London: Kogan Page
- Juru, C.P. (2002) *An Investigation into the Effectiveness of SDA/SDCs in Decision-making in Gweru Secondary Schools*. (Unpublished master's thesis) Zimbabwe Open University, Zimbabwe
- Khoza, S. F. (2003) *Teacher Participation in Site Based Management in Schools*. Pretoria: RSA
- Kumar, D.D. and Scuderi, P. (2000) Opportunities for teachers as policy makers. *Kappa-Delta-Pi Record*, 36, 2, 61-64
- Lejk, M. and Wyvill, M. (1996) A Survey of methods of deriving individual grades from group assessments. *Evaluation in Higher Education*, 21, 3, 267-281
- Li, L.K.Y. (2001) Some Refinements on Peer Assessment of Group Projects. *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education*, 26, 1, 5-18
- Likert, R. (1996) *The human organisation: Its management and value*. New York: McGraw-Hill
- Lilyquist, J.G. (1998) *Are Schools Really Like This? Factors affecting teacher attitude toward school improvement*. New York: Plenum Press
- Matunhu, J. (2002) *A study into the perception and involvement of Gweru Urban school recruitment committees (SRC) in the decentralized recruitment and selection of teachers* (Unpublished master's thesis) Harare: Zimbabwe Open University
- Mokoena, S F. (2003) *Exploring Effective Decision-Making of Principals in the Free State*. Pretoria: Unisa
- Morse, W.C., Berger, N.H., and Osnes, P.G. (1997) *Group Dynamics and Ethical School Based Decision-Making in Ethics and Decision-Making in Local Schools*. Baltimore: Paul. H. Books
- Mosoge, M.J. and Van der Westhuizen, P.C. (1998) School based management and school effectiveness: Implications for the new roles of Principals and Teachers. *Koers Journal*, 63, 2, 73-87
- Mungunda, C. (2003) *An Investigation into School Principals' Experiences and Perceptions of Participative Management*. (Unpublished master's thesis) Grahamstown : Rhodes University,
- Newman, D.R. Johnson, C., Webb, B., and Cochrane, C. (1997) Evaluating the

- quality of learning in computer supported cooperative learning. *Journal of the American Society for Information Science*, 48, 6, 484-495. Available online at <http://www.qub.ac.uk/mgt/papers/jasis/jasis.html> (accessed 30 October 2010)
- Orsmond, P., Merry, S., and Reiling, K. (1996) Importance of marking criteria in the use of peer assessment. *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education*, 21, 3, 239-250
- Prozesky, H.E. and Mouton, J. (2005) *The Participatory Research Paradigm*. Cape Town: Oxford
- Rezabek, R.J. (1999) *A Study of the Motives, Barriers, and Enables Affecting Participation In Adult Distance Education Classes in an Iowa Community College* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation) Cedar Falls, IA: University of Northern Iowa
- Sadovnik, R.A. (2007) *Sociology of Education. A critical reader*. London: Routledge
- Wadesango, N and Shumba, A. (2009) Impact of teacher participation in decision-making. *Journal of educational Studies*, 8, 4, 69-75
- Wall, R. and Rinchart, J.R. (1999) School based decision-making and the empowerment of Secondary School Teachers. *Journal of School Leadership*, 8, 1, 49-64
- Wagner, D. (1999) Make disciples of all nations in teacher leadership: Long in coming, coming on strong. *Momentum*, 30, 4, 42-46
- Zimbabwean School Act. (1995) *Education Amendment*. Harare: Government Printers